Basic Layout of Original Illumination for Use in the SCA

Definitions:

1. Illumination – The art or act of decorating a text, page, or initial letter with ornamental designs, miniatures, or lettering; or an example of this art.
2. Gutter – The white space formed by the inner margins of two facing pages, as of a book.
3. Framing gutter – The white space all the way around a page left intentionally to accommodate the framing of an illuminated page.
4. Text gutter – The white space between your illumination and the calligraphy.
5. Hard gutter – The white space in which you want absolute zero bleed.
6. Soft gutter – The white space in which minor to moderate bleed is acceptable.
7. Bleed – Any text or image that crosses over into a gutter is said to bleed.
8. Line weight – The relative thickness and darkness of a line.
9. Illumination box or frame – Defined area on your page where you plan to use decoration and motifs.
10. Text box or frame – Defined area on your page where you plan to use calligraphy.
11. Decorated initial – The first letter of a word, which has been decorated as a motif piece as part of the over all design. Usually found as the first word of a document.
12. Motif – A recurrent thematic element in an artistic or literary work.
13. Tooth – A measure of how the surface of the paper holds drawing and painting mediums. A smooth paper with coarse tooth will feel rough to the touch.
14. Layout grid – The combination of all gutters, text, and illumination frames drawn out on the page.

Tools

- ❖ Straight edge
- ❖ Transparent ruler
- ❖ Compass
- ❖ Drawing templates
- ❖ French curves
- ❖ Pencils (several lead weights)
- ❖ Technical pens
- ❖ Erasers
- ❖ Cover sheets or cotton gloves (or an artist bridge)
- ❖ T-square
- ❖ Drawing board
- ❖ Light box
- ❖ Lettering guide

Paper

Note: Any and all paper should be acid free archival quality. Even pencil sketches will last years on this type of paper. For original scrolls, 150 # or heavier paper is recommended for design work. For new kingdom charters, I recommend drawing medium as a minimum quality of paper.

- ❖ Sketch paper/pad – Usually 30 to 40 # paper. Good for initial concept drawings and playing with motifs.

- ❖ Drawing medium – Usually 80 to 100 # paper used for design work and drafting of designs. Excellent for pencil and ink, but does not hold paint well.

- ❖ Bristol board – Bristol is a commercial art board that comes in weights starting at 100 # and continuing up to heavy illustration board. Bristol can be found in a semi-smooth surface and a smooth surface with almost no tooth. Bristol takes most mediums well; however, it has a low absorption rate, so care must be exercised when using a full liquid paint. Ink must also be allowed to dry fully or it may smear. Many artists in the SCA use Bristol to produce original scrolls.

- ❖ Watercolor paper – Watercolor paper is a porous higher absorption paper designed for use with watercolor paints. It ranges in weight from 70 # up to heavy board. Watercolor paper comes in a variety of surfaces depending on what type of press it was made in. "Cold Press" will have a consistently uneven surface with a consistent strong tooth. "Hot Press" will have a smooth surface with a consistent light tooth. "Rag Press" will have an inconsistent surface and tooth. Many artists in the SCA for production of original scrolls use Cold Press and Hot Press. Rag Press is not recommended for this purpose.

- ❖ Vellum and Parchment – Not actually paper at all, vellum is calfskin and parchment is either sheep or goatskin. Both can be prepared for use as surfaces for writing and decoration. Though these materials are the period surfaces used for illumination and calligraphy, we will focus on commercial papers in this class due to the specialized techniques used to prepare vellum and parchment. The techniques of layout and design remain the same.

Choose a Style

When designing an illuminated page for SCA use, the first thing to define is the style to be used for both the illumination and the calligraphy. Once we know what we want to make, we can begin defining how we are going to put this work on paper.

In order to make our work look like something from an illuminated manuscript of the period, we will have to evaluate the layout that was used in the original. In choosing the style we wish to recreate, we have already found, in most cases, multiple images of work in that style. We will use these to define our layout.

Basic Layout

Step one

Look at the pictures you have found, and take mental or written notes on any areas or design elements that catch your eye. Start deciding now what elements will be changed, left unused, created, and/or moved. Look at multiple pages, if available, to determine what features are consistent to this style. Decide if the

images have a hard outline that will need to be inked in, or if there is an absence of hard outline. Sometimes you will find a combination of these factors.

Step two

Note the colors used in the original. Look for the absence of colors as well (for example, no metallic gold in the Book of Kells). Don't forget to read the write-ups in your source material. Some will even tell you the exact pigments used in the original Assess what paints you will need to paint your work.

Step three

Make a grayscale photocopy of the page you mean to be your principal source. Using multiple color pens and your straight edge or transparent ruler, find the planes and lines that appear to you to be the framework that was used to create the original. This information is invaluable for recreating the style and feel of the period Illumination. If needed, trace the lines you have drawn on a blank sheet so that you can see the layout grid without the picture. If you are making large departures from the original design, work out your placement grid according to these mark-ups. Keep these on hand. You will use them later.

Step four

Stop looking at the piece for a couple hours. Eat dinner, relax, then evaluate what you have done and repeat any steps as necessary.

Step five

Decide what size you are going to make this piece. Will you maintain the period size for the manuscript source you are using, or will you use the standard framing sizes as outlined in the scroll text packet? Now is also the time to decide if you will be working in landscape or portrait orientation. Get your paper out, cut it to size as needed, and fasten it to your drawing board. If you are going to use a T-square, make sure you square your paper with the edges of your board.

Step six

Draw your framing gutter. You will need a minimum of ¾ inch from the edge of the page all the way around for framing. More space may be needed if the piece will be matted. Place a mark at the mid-point on each side on the edge of the paper. This mark will be invaluable to you as you proceed with your layout. It is placed on the edge so that if you forget about it later (which can, does, and will happen), framing will cover it up.

Step seven

Draw a ¼ to ½ inch soft gutter inside your framing gutter. This provides you with a buffer zone should any designs or flourishes bleed from the text and illumination frames.

Step eight

Using your mark-up on the grayscale photocopy as a guide, establish your illumination and text areas. Don't forget to leave gutters between frames as necessary. If you are working with another person, make sure they know which gutters are hard and which are soft.

Once you have done this, the basic layout grid has been established. From here, we start adding our basic illumination, penciling in our text using a lettering guide, establishing where any illuminated initials go, and so on.

Once the layout grid is established, you can use whatever means you are most comfortable with in order to put in the decoration and text.

Framing Gutter

Illumination Frame

Illuminated Initial

Text Gutter

Framing Gutter

Soft Gutter

Illumination Frame

Text Gutter

Text Frame

Soft Gutter

Framing Gutter

<- Illuminated Initials ->

Soft Gutter

Framing Gutter